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Ephesians: God's Display Case

Ephesians 2:7-10

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In Paul's great letter to the Ephesians, we are working through the text slowly in an attempt to understand the underlying realities of life and of faith. You'll remember that in the opening words of chapter two, we looked at the condition which lies behind all the difficulties and problems we have in life, the state into which humankind has fallen, and how desperately hopeless we are apart from the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

I recently read an article in the magazine *Atlantic* that looked at how Americans were dealing with the events of 9/11. The author, one of the two Friday night columnists on the *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, used as his theme the national map presented on most networks during the most recent presidential election. Some of the states were colored in blue - those that went for Al Gore, while others were colored in red - those that went for George Bush. He contrasted the differences between 'blue America' and 'red America.' And he showed how we have come together as one America in the aftermath of the September national tragedy.

The article also made me remember all the promises of the political parties during that election, each one saying it's the ultimate hope for redemption here in the United States, and that if we but elect the right candidate, we can count on having all our economic problems solved, all conflicts resolved, and life will be good. Yet, I have heard all this many, many times, as you have, at each election cycle. By experience we know that it's right to examine the issues, and though there were differences between the candidates, and though we knew it was proper and important for us to vote, nevertheless we also knew that no political party was going to really solve the problems we see. Most of us recognized then, and recognize now, that the problems we have as a nation are going to be with us yet, because the condition is deeper than politics.

That's what we discussed in the first verses of Ephesians 2. The condition we have is endemic - it's part of the human experience. Positive thinking isn't enough. Politics isn't enough. But when a man or a woman turns to Jesus Christ, an absolutely new, fundamentally different condition is introduced - we are made alive in Christ, we are raised up with him, and we are made to sit in the heavenly realms. We spent several weeks talking about this new possibility for humanity made feasible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, beginning with verse seven (7), we look beyond our present experience to the future which lies ahead of us:

"in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, though faith - and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Jesus Christ to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Once Paul gets beyond the explanation of our condition, and the fundamentally different condition made possible in Christ, he shifts to the very purpose of God in redeeming humankind. That's where we are this morning, and where the preaching will take us in the next weeks - the purpose of our redemption.

Why does God come into our lives? Why is it that he raised us up with Christ and made us to sit together with him in the heavenly realms? His answer in these verses is that in the coming ages he might display the incomparable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. In other words, God's purpose in doing all this is that he might have a display case in which his own grace - his glory and his character - can become evident.

Have you ever seen a coffee table book of the many Norman Rockwell paintings that (mostly) appeared on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*? It's great fun to wade through this kind of book because you see this great slice of Americana spread out. Some passing mood, some look, some situation which evokes either humor or a sense of nostalgia. Some make you laugh out loud, others lead you almost to tears.

I think that's exactly what Paul has in mind here. God is going to put us on display, he says. Each one of us will be a vivid demonstration of the grace and the perfection of God's character. The glory of God will be visible in us throughout the coming ages - especially as it is manifested, Paul says, by his kindness toward us. This is precisely what will make God's very glory stand out and be so meaningful to other people - the evidence of the kindness of God toward us.

We have many blessings for which to be thankful. We have a terrific church. We have a wonderful choir. We have great teachers and advisors. These are only some of the blessings we have. These blessings, and others, are aspects of the kindness of God toward us. And when the Pilgrims had their first Thanksgiving, even in the midst of poverty, distress, and threats to their very lives, they too gave thanks that God had abundantly blessed them.

But this kindness isn't confined to natural blessings. It's also redemptive. Those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior may claim the washing of regeneration and a renewing of the Holy Spirit. I believe we have already tasted but a mere trickle of God's grace, yet this trickle is itself so rich and abundant that it blows the fuses of our understanding when it begins to dawn on us what we already have. And Paul suggests this kindness of God toward us will increase on and on into the future, that in the coming ages God will continue to do what he has already begun. So this is my way of challenging you to a deeper presence of God in your life - if you think you have all that God has to give you, please, ask for more!

There is a lot more in this passage which I will get to in the coming weeks. Stay tuned! But I want you to just think about expanding your perspective. God has far greater prospects ahead for you - and for our church - than our current, present experience. Lift your eyes from today! I am absolutely convinced that God wants to show us more kindness, more love, more power, more of Himself, than we have yet experienced. Why am I so sure? Because we are learning now, in this age, so that we might be prepared to display the greatness of God's glory in the coming ages. God wants to do more with you so that you can display his glory. I'm up for it! How about you?

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